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BRIEF MENTION

The Modern English Verb-Adverb Combination. By Arthur Garfield Kennedy (Stanford University Publications, University Series: Language and Literature, vol. 1, No. 1. Published by the University, 1920). The importance of the subject of this monograph is made strikingly clear by observations at the beginning (p. 8) and at the end (p. 49). It is observed that the editors of *Webster's Dictionary* and the editors of the *NED.* are free in using the verb-adverb combination "in defining other words." Thus, Webster, *cage* 'to shut up, or confine'; in the *NED.* *act* 2 'to bring into action, bring about.' "Not infrequently the editors of the *NED.* have utilized combinations in writing definitions which they have failed to define or illustrate in their proper places, which seems to show that some of our verb-adverb combinations are more necessary in the expression of ideas than scholars are willing to admit formally." Again (p. 49), "It is slightly amusing to find that, as in the case of the verb, the editors of *Webster's Dictionary* occasionally refuse official recognition to a combination-noun but let it slip in as part of a definition; which goes to show that the student of current tendencies is likely to be confronted not infrequently with the problem of classifying and defining a phrase which is rendering a definite service in language and yet has received no official recognition." With no trace of exaggeration these plain facts freshly invite the attention of the lexicographer and of the grammarian.

It is to be understood that, whereas the term 'verb-adverb compound' would accurately describe many of the combinations here considered, its use would require the drawing of a distinct line where no such line can be drawn, namely between true compounds and the looser combinations. The author has therefore adopted the comprehensive term 'verb-adverb combination,' which interprets his assumption that in the forms here studied "the verb and the combining particle" are united in greatly differing degrees of closeness. But there is no inexcusable evasion of a difficulty in this. Dr. Kennedy recognizes a true compound when the combining elements are fused into a symbol for the expression of a new meaning, a symbol in which the separate elements "have almost or altogether sacrificed their individual meanings." This new meaning can often be expressed by another word. Thus, *come by*, 'acquire'; *make out*, 'understand'; *put out*, 'extinguish.' "In other combinations, however, and by far the greatest number, the verb is modified in meaning by a certain weakly adverbial function of the particle but does not entirely merge its verbal personality in the combination. The particle, it is true, loses much of its usual adverbial or prepositional signification but in the combination assumes peculiar adverbial values, as, for example, in . . . *bottle up*, 'enclose in a bottle.' *button up*, 'fasten with buttons.' And in many others, finally, the usual values of verb and prepositional-

adverb remain fairly evident, as in *brush off, brush out, burn down, . . . hang up, leak out, . . . tack down.*" Evidently, as Dr. Kennedy observes, "this last group of combinations shades off so imperceptibly into the great mass of adverbial modifications such as *fly away, walk south, go home, etc.*, that it would be a hopeless undertaking to attempt to classify every verb-adverb combination as either close enough to be termed a verb-adverb compound, or loose enough to be called merely an adverbial modification."

That Dr. Kennedy has taken a sound grammatical view of his subject is made clear in the preceding paragraph. As a good workman he next advances from broad outlines to the determination of reasonable and effective limits for his immediate purpose. Accordingly he restricts "the material for the present study" to "combinations formed with the sixteen prepositional-adverbs *about, across, around (or round), at, by, down, for, in, off, on, out, over, thru, to, up, with.*" Moreover, there shall be no "thoroughgoing attempt to classify verb-adverb combinations as either acceptable English or as colloquial and slang," that is, to pronounce upon the "social status of each combination and usage."

The "Theory and History" of these combinations is the title of a section (pp. 11-18) that is suggestive but avowedly inconclusive as to both topics. Occurrences of the combination are reported for the early periods of the language (from Anglo-Saxon to Early Modern English), and hints are given of what the historian of the usage must consider. There has been a dying off of verbal compounds, and an "inrush of a multitude of Romanic verbs with inseparable prefixes" (p. 12), "which drove out the native compounds and for a time made the newer combination unnecessary" (p. 13); and to be reckoned with are the subtle manifestations of changes in the habitual fashion of native expression, the fashion or mood traceable in a growing preference for the figurative expression, for what is liberal rather than restrained, practical even plebeian rather than stiff and pedantic. The allurements of the subject in its historic aspects are strong, but Dr. Kennedy resists them, for he has in mind to be immediately and practically helpful to the teachers of rhetoric and composition, and to all who are intelligently caring for good English.

On the practical side of his subject Dr. Kennedy has proved himself to be well-poised in judgment. He has succeeded admirably in upholding the effective use of the 'combinations,' and in discerning in them the reflection of the most vital processes of usage; and he has equally well administered the needed caution against ignorant complacency, misdirected approval, and that abuse of the usage which is indicative of bad taste. A collation of several of the practical observations made under these heads will show that Dr. Kennedy has a clear perception of the right doctrine to be enforced. The 'compound' tends to become fixed in a figurative value and as "a linguistic fossil" (p. 14) is marked off from the

live 'combination,' which represents a process of formation that is actively maintained in every grade of usage, from slang to poetry. It is observed that "most speakers and writers who are attempting to effect contact with the poorly trained speaker of English will show numerous verb-abverb combinations of a colloquial or slangy character" (p. 17). Now two prominent objections stand out against an excessive use of 'combinations.' It is a mark of bad taste, perhaps of restricted power of expression, and often an indication of mental inertia, of laziness, to be limited by the exclusive use of, for example, the combination *to give in* in the figurative sense expressed by the neglected words 'submit, yield'; or to say habitually *give out*, neglecting the use of 'fail.' The second objection which is less formidable than the first, relates to the faulty logic of the redundant use of the prepositional-adverbs; "yet such redundancies as *bow down, fill up, hatch out*, have become so well entrenched in the language that one scarcely thinks it possible to use them otherwise" (p. 18). The purist may object to many combinations on the ground that the particle adds nothing to the meaning, but Dr. Kennedy believes "that the speaker almost always feels a nice distinction even tho his sense of the logical tells him that the particle should be quite unnecessary. The particle has been added in the first place to give emphasis, or perhaps to round out the speech-rhythm by the interpolation of a syllable; but once having done this, we proceed to acquire a feeling that the simple verb can not express quite what the compound does. So we say, for example, *add up, . . . bow down, . . . deal out, fold up, hatch out, . . . pile up, . . . taper off, wake up*," etc. (p. 28). Another group of verb-adverb combinations is accredited by long use to "special contexts." Thus, "*bid in*, according to Webster, implies that the present owner buys back his own property at auction; *bind out* usually applies to apprenticing; . . . we *call up* usually by telephone; one *crams up* for an examination; . . . *kick off* is a football term; . . . we still feel that *offer up* is suggestive of sacrifice" (p. 28).

Dr. Kennedy has collected a larger number of these combinations than he finds it 'practicable' to publish. He sees that he is dealing with "a changing, growing tendency in language which throws up overnight, as it were, new combinations, and new meanings, so that an absolute and complete list would be impossible" (p. 5). What he has therefore undertaken is a deduction from his extensive material, a consideration of selected groups of examples from which to reason out the linguistic principles of the usage. His modest hope is that his study "may prove suggestive to the average speaker of English and may even lead some to a more thoughtful use of these combinations" (p. 6). But many a serious and even technical student of the language will be ready to confess that Dr. Kennedy has led him to see in this subject principles of unsuspected importance.

How the selected prepositional-adverbs 'combine' in present day

usage is shown in a section that gives an insight into the problem. This is offered as a general statement, that in 'combination' the particle may keep its independent meaning unchanged; or it may take on a meaning not associated with it when used separately; or it may be "so merged with the verb that it seems no longer to have an independent value" (p. 19). Thus, one distinguishes the literal use of *out* in combinations like *hand out*, *spread out*, from the more figurative use in *carry out*, 'complete,' and from the third use in *make out*, 'comprehend,' *give out*, 'fail,' *try out*, 'make a trial of,' in which the verb and the particle are fused to express a meaning not obviously suggested by either. This three-fold division of course merely marks the high-points of difference in long series of overlapping meanings. The prepositional-adverbs considered in this chapter with respect to their values as 'combining' particles vary greatly in frequency of combination. The particle *up* is the most frequent, and has the widest "range of meanings in combination." Next in frequency is the particle *out*, which however enters into less than half as many combinations. The remaining particles of the list fall far below these two in frequency. This supremacy of *up* and *out* points significantly to a characteristic aspect of creative and figurative tendencies in the usage.

Four general categories of 'syntactical effects of combination' are pointed out (pp. 26-27): (1) an intransitive verb may be a member of a transitive combination, as in *come by*, 'acquire'; (2) conversely an intransitive combination may result from the association of the particle with a transitive verb, as in *cheer up*, *get about*; (3) the combination may require a different object from that of the simple verb, as shown by contrasting '*argue a case*' with '*argue down an opponent*'; (4) some combinations have the "significance or connotation of a passive verb," thus, "a piece of cloth will *make up* nicely, . . . a plan *works out* well." Dr. Kennedy has here suggested a grammatical subject, abounding in fine distinctions, that would reward a more complete investigation. So too under the heading "Peculiarities of Combination" there are problems in grammar and rhetoric introduced to the student of the language in an admirable and striking manner. The word 'introduced' is to enter the charge of a deficiency against the school-manuals. Deep lessons relating to the inherent character of the language are to be learned by considering the laws of sentence-stress and the rhythmic principles involved in the use of these combinations, and by observing in them the relation of native to non-Teutonic words.

It is the last of the suggested problems that is the most profoundly important. Some of the easily observed facts that have a deep historical and linguistically philosophic meaning are described and illustrated by Dr. Kennedy. He observes that the average speaker finds it easier to say *keep on* than always to have in mind for ready use the foreign equivalent *continue*; so with *put out* and *extinguish*; *use up* and *exhaust*. And then a list is added which includes *get on*, 'prosper'; *let down*, 'relax'; *pull out*, 'depart,'

with the observation that these combinations represent the usage of the indifferent speaker, in distinction from the "average man of fairly good education," who will usually employ the simple verbs. As to the speaker, however, a further distinction is to be made: "Many a college professor or other public speaker uses the combination in his ordinary conversation, and even in lecturing, but shifts to a more formal, less colloquial, vocabulary the moment he begins to write" (p. 39). Dr. Kennedy will not be misunderstood at this point, for he has properly insisted on the legitimate use of combinations and on the significant fact that this usage represents a vital and creative force in the language.

The legitimate vitality of this combining-process invites the attention of the historic and philosophic grammarian. He will, of course, not overlook the subtleties involved in distinguishing a true verbal compound from a merely syntactical combination of 'particle' and verb,—an aspect of the subject that for German has been well discussed by Professor von Jagemann (*MLN*, v, 1 ff., 1890); but he will be more attentive to that other aspect of the problem which for English has a special importance that is not easily over-estimated. This concerns the peculiar facts and consequences of the history of the language since the Norman Conquest.

In adopting Romanic elements the language has maintained, with temporary compromises, the essentials of its Germanic character. This is shown in a striking manner in the accentuation of substantive and verbal compounds. The native prefixes had become an impoverished category when English was vastly enriched by the varied list brought in from Romanic sources. Pairs of compounds like *abstract* : *abstráct*, *subject* : *subjéct*, etc., represent not only the reënforcement of the vocabulary by words compounded with significant prefixes, but also the perpetuation of native principles of word-accentuation. This observation brings one close to a view of the particular influences to be considered in the development of the use of 'combinations' as here designated. Aside from its influence and aid in the expansion and articulation of thought,—a subject that remains to be competently studied,—the foreign vocabulary has doubled the means of expression, resulting in two types of style, of which the one may be symbolized by the exclusive use of forms like *get round*, the other by the preferred use of forms like *circumvent*. The infinite degrees of the blending of these extreme styles contribute to the unmatched resourcefulness of the language. The point to be observed in this connection is however this, that no variety of the polysyllabic style, however 'Johnsonian' it may be, totally obscures the fact that the foreign 'compounds' have not overcome but have, on the contrary, greatly stimulated the continuous formation and the increasing use of the synonymous 'combinations' of native elements, which conserve the native sentence-stress and protect the monosyllabic character of the language against an excess in yielding to the foreign pattern.